Van Gogh's Ear
by Ed Higgins

A drunken evening, both men soused and twitchy. An argument ensues with Yellow House roommate Paul Gauguin. The two dissing each other's work like clicking beetles. Seething, Vincent picks up a threatening straight razor. Gauguin edges away as Vincent turns the razor on himself, cutting off his left ear in a rage. The appendage falls to the floor, where Vincent's dog Angelus snatches the bloody ear snidling back under the nearby bed, where she'd been cowering during the set-to.

> grey air—
> shivering
> in my lungs

Angelus chews on the fallen treat. Vincent, bleeding profusely and cursing the dog, drops to his knees stretching an arm under the bed. Gauguin sobered by the mayhem drops to his knees to help retrieve the ear from Angelus' jaws. Dust bunnies fly from their efforts. A whacking broom frees the masticated ear, scooting from under the bed like a lost toy.

Towel pressed against his wound Vincent picks up the ear, wrapping it in a half-sheet of newspaper. *Now what?* shouts Gauguin. Van Gogh rushes out the door to the Arles brothel where earlier he and Gauguin were hard drinking and falling out over Rachel, a favorite of the two. The young woman's aghast to receive the grotesque gift, stained by newsprint ink.

> night stars
> striking
> through mist

Wanly smiling, blood soaked Van Gogh returns home, collapsing unconscious on his bed. The next morning attracted by Angelus' howling, police are called. Vincent's taken to the hospital by a local gendarme—Rachel sends along the ear. The artist is near death. Fearing implication Gauguin hastily returns to Paris by train.

Van Gogh survives his injury. A week later back home he paints two self-portraits showing a thickly bandaged right ear: mirror images. Vincent never speaks of the incident. A Dr. Ray may have kept the dog-mangled ear, taken the token home to his own dog. All the facts are disputed. There are, of course, the two self-portraits. An earlier painting called *Dog* presents a medium size dog opened-jaw, snarling, about to leap . . . .

sunflowers
brash yellow
fill the field